

DENTAL CARE FOR OUR TROOPS ACT

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Endorsed By:

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The military's reserve components must maintain trained and healthy forces available for mobilization or deployment. Still, reserve component servicemembers are not provided the same benefits to maintain their readiness as those on active duty. Despite being responsible for their own deployability, reserve component servicemembers receive no assistance in affording dental insurance or expensive dental procedures. This impacts the readiness of our total force and leaves us less prepared as a nation. The Dental Care for Our Troops Act would provide reserve component servicemembers with consistent, year-round access to no-premium dental care to ensure they are ready to deploy and serve our country when called upon.

The Issue: Dental Health Impacts Readiness

Dental health is vital to military readiness, and today there are over 75,000 reserve component servicemembers that are non-deployable for dental issues. During the post-9/11 period, more than 20 percent of guard and reserve members were non-deployable, and another 15 percent were removed from duty during deployment due to dental issues.¹

Preventive dental care is vital for the total force. Cigna Health calculates that adults who practice preventive oral health care can save 31 percent in dental costs over five years. Likewise, adults who don't receive preventive care can expect a 43 percent increase to their annual dental costs over the same period of time.² Letting reserve component servicemembers go without dental insurance presents a readiness and total cost risk.

Despite making up almost half of our armed forces, reserve component servicemembers still do not have access to the continuous preventative dental care needed to maintain dental readiness for deployments. Reserve component servicemembers are held to the same deployment and readiness standards as active duty personnel, with a dental exam required annually. The Reserve Health Readiness Program provides free vouchers for the exam, but reserve component servicemembers are responsible for paying for any follow-on treatment needed to deploy. While there are cases where the Army will pay to treat the most critical dental issues, this level of care is inconsistent across the various armed forces.³

The Solution: Premium-free TRICARE Dental Program

This legislation would waive premiums and co-pays in the TRICARE Dental Program for all members of the reserve component. Increasing access to preventative dental care will reduce costly emergency dental treatment and improve readiness for our total force military. The provisions included in this act have no direct spending implications.

¹ <https://academic.oup.com/milmed/article/179/6/666/4160811?login=true>

² <https://www.cigna.com/static/www-cigna-com/docs/employers-brokers/dental-white-paper.pdf>

³ <https://www.health.mil/Military-Health-Topics/Combat-Support/Public-Health/Health-Readiness-Support/Reserve-Health-Readiness-Program/Our-Services>